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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA MEETS WITH TARGAMADZE

REF: TBILISI 569

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On May 12, EUR DAS Matthew Bryza and the Ambassador met with Chairman of the new opposition Christian Democratic Movement (CDM) party, Giorgi Targamadze. Before the meeting, Targamadze briefed the Ambassador on Imedi TV's current status, saying that a dispute regarding government control over editorial policy will likely preclude any news coverage until September. He said the CDM has established offices throughout most of Georgia and is putting the knowledge gained from USAID-funded IRI focus groups to good use in building his campaign. Targamadze discussed his party's platform and goals, and said the CDM may result as the largest opposition faction after the election. He said U.S. support would be critical to ensure democratic reforms in Parliament after May 21. DAS Bryza underlined the seriousness of the ongoing dispute with Russia over Abkhazia, and discussed how a new forum is needed for the Georgians and Abkhaz to meet without Russian influence. End summary.

Background Note

12. (SBU) Targamadze is the former MP who headed deposed-Adjaran warlord, Aslan Abashidze's faction in Parliament prior to 2004. Most recently, Targamadze was the lead anchor and director of news programming for Imedi TV. He had a key media role in the November protests and was then seen as a strong opponent of the Saakashvili government. Targamadze and several other leading journalists quit the station in December after the GOG aired footage of deceased Imedi owner Badri Patarkatsishvili attempting to co-opt an MOIA official and foment an insurrection against President Saakashvili. Following this, Targamadze created the Christian-Democratic Movement party, modeled on European Christian-Democratic parties but with a strong populist and latent nationalist streak, and heads its party list for the May 21 parliamentary elections. Current Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research polls project the CDM is likely to win approximately 11 percent of the nationwide, party list vote, which would be enough to create a faction in Parliament.

Brief Update on Imedi

13. (C) On May 12, EUR DAS Matthew Bryza, the Ambassador, and EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor Michael Carpenter met with CDM Chairman, Giorgi Targamadze, and CDM International Secretary, George Rukhadze. In a prelude to the meeting, Targamadze told the Ambassador an ongoing dispute over editorial policy will likely preclude Imedi TV from covering any news until September. He acknowledged that Patarkatsishvili and Joseph Kay had a close working relationship, but claimed that the GOG influenced Joseph Kay's acquisition of Imedi (reftel) and will also control Imedi's editorial policy. He said he understands that Patarkatsishvili's family continues to dispute Kay's claim to ownership of Imedi. Targamadze said

that he, fellow Imedi employees, and the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, talked Patarkatsishvili out of trading Imedi to the government for the Georgian railroad last fall. Targamadze said Boris Berezovsky "played a bad role" in the process and radicalized Patarkatsishvili, convincing him to run for President against Patarkatsishvili's own wishes. Targamadze said that at the height of the confrontation, "both sides tried to co-opt us." Now, he said he is trying to preserve "freedom of speech" with his CDM campaign, as he tried to do as a news anchor at Imedi.

CDM Campaign Underway

14. (C) Targamadze thanked the U.S. for providing USAID-funded IRI focus groups to help his party prepare its campaign. He said they were very useful, as the CDM had no money to conduct any research itself. He said the CDM has established offices throughout most of Georgia, including the minority regions, and is campaigning throughout the country. Targamadze said he is focusing his efforts on reaching out to people, explaining that Western values are trying to help Georgians form a democratic society, and working to help make people's lives better after the election. Targamadze said economic problems are the population's biggest concern. In addition to these, his party is working on proposals to address social and demographic problems, constitutional changes, a law on religion, and ideas for agricultural reform.

15. (C) Targamadze denounced the current political process as

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unfair. He said businesses are afraid to donate to his campaign, which has hurt his party. He noted that media coverage is better than during the January election, but rules granting the opposition equal air time do not apply to political talk shows, which are a major source of voters' information about the political process. Targamadze said the CDM has tried to avoid clashes with other political parties, including the ruling United National Movement. He said the campaign has become "not a game of rules, but of life and death." He said "we are not afraid of competition, but we need rules of the game." According to Targamadze, the U.S. needs to help ensure this fairness during the campaign, as well as support democratic reforms in Parliament and help build western-style political parties after May 21. Targamadze foresees a split in the Joint Opposition after the election, and believes the CDM may become the largest opposition faction in Parliament. He told DAS Bryza that room indeed exists in the center between pro- and anti-Saakashvili camps, and he is trying to attract the disaffected voters in this space. He said many New Rightists voters now support him, because New Rightists leader Davit Gamkrelidze joined the United Opposition.

DAS Bryza Talks about Abkhazia

16. (C) After noting additional USG assistance dedicated to improving the election process, DAS Bryza turned to Abkhazia.

He underlined the seriousness of the current tension surrounding Abkhazia. He told Targamadze that it appears Putin has tried to create a win-win for himself by ratcheting up the tension with Georgia over the breakaway region. Bryza said if Georgia fails to propose any new initiatives and allows Abkhazia to drift further into the Russian orbit, it loses and Russia wins. If Georgia tries to retake Abkhazia by force, it suffers an even more devastating loss and Russia wins. Given the current situation, a fresh approach is needed. Bryza said the UN Group of Friends is not working and a new forum is needed to breath new life into the peace process.

17. (C) Bryza said such a forum must address three key issues:

1) the return of IDPs; 2) the need to provide Abkhazia a sense of security that Georgia will not attack (and that the return of IDPs will not threaten Abkhaz national identity); and 3) economic development of Abkhazia through reintegration with Georgia proper. Bryza told Targamadze that he had spoken with the UN, Europeans, and the Abkhaz about these issues. Bryza said UNOMIG is beneficial to the people in Gali, so the goal is not to eliminate it or do away entirely with the Group of Friends. Rather, he said a new forum should be established organically alongside the Group of Friends. The rejuvenation of the peace process would therefore consist of three components: 1) the elaboration of Georgia's peace initiatives through direct talks with the Abkhaz, to specify the constitutional guarantees for Abkhaz autonomy; 2) restraining Russia politically (with international partners) to prevent further infringement on Georgia's sovereignty; and 3) building the new international forum from the ground up, so that Georgians and Abkhaz can meet without a Russian veto.

18. (C) Targamadze thanked DAS Bryza for the information and agreed that he and his party could and would fully support such a proposal. He noted that the CDM has been calling on the government to avoid any drift towards armed conflict. He also said Georgia should avoid signing any agreements with Russia over the conflict regions, as Russia had not met its previous obligations under peace deals in the 1990s. Targamadze said that Georgia must work with its western friends in regard to the conflict regions, or else disaster would ensue. He said that his party currently does not trust the government, and therefore does not speak with them, but reiterated his support for Bryza's peace plan.

19. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this cable.
TEFFT